MEDIA ARTS FOUNDATION PROGRAM COURSE CATALOG 2026-2027

Exceptional Minds' **Media Arts Program** is a one year, three trimester, full time program that builds foundational artistic digital media skills for college-age students on the autism spectrum. It is designed for those who are new to post-secondary education and media arts or those with limited experience who want to enhance their portfolio and related skills for further success studying or working.

Included in this catalog is:

- Program Overview
- Evaluation System
- Graduation Requirements and Program Learning Objectives
- Course Sequence Overview
- Course Descriptions and Course Objectives

Program Overview

With technical courses committed to the intersection of media-making and technology, this is a program that builds entry level media generalists and creative assistants. Curriculum areas of focus include: design, storytelling, media creation, professional practice, and work integrated learning.

In addition to mastering digital tools and related technology, the program aims to improve the students' executive function, social and emotional well being with programming that finds a meaningful balance between whole-person development and academics. This balance between academics and soft skills is critical for student success and is supported by a student services group that includes a behavioral team and career advancement manager.

Pathways for students in the Media Arts Foundation include Exceptional Minds' three year Animation/VFX program, other college media art offerings and apprenticeship programs. Outside of academic pathways, graduates may pursue entry level creative generalist and creative PA (production assistant) work in entertainment and media and adjacent industries or entrepreneurial pursuits.

Evaluation System

Student Evaluations: The Media Arts Foundation Program incorporates a system of feedback that focuses on student progress rather than grades that are used in traditional educational institutions.

A system of **Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Curriculum Learning Outcomes (CLOs)** make up what a student learns in each of their individual courses. Instructors also note social and executive functioning advancements that a student completes.

MAF focuses on giving students a *qualitative review* of the progress they've made while giving them different designations on meeting curriculum and executive functioning designations. The progress thresholds given twice a trimester in each course are ***Room for Growth, Developing, Proficient, and Excellent.***

Students who have concerns about their overall progress in a particular course are encouraged to reach out to their individual instructors if more than two weeks have lapsed since feedback was last given.

After School Labs: *Technical Labs* run every Tuesday and Thursday from 4:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. Students can use lab time in Technical Lab for further advancement on class assignments or personal projects. ***Drawing Lab*** runs every Wednesday for students looking to improve their skills in this subject.

Clubs, Workshops, and Special Event Activities: Throughout the school year, Exceptional Minds offers students the opportunity to participate in ***Clubs*** as well as ***After-school, Saturday Workshops,*** *and* ***Special Event Activities***. In order to participate, over 50% of progress reports should have a designation of "Developing" or above.

Social Programming: *Social Programming*, which includes activities such as D&D role-playing, movie night, and game night, is available throughout the year. Students will be asked to sign up to participate. Students' ability to participate in *social programming* is not affected by class performance.

Health & Wellness: Students are encouraged to participate in daily ***Lunchtime Walks***. Students are also able to make weekly or bi-monthly appointments with our on-staff ***Behavior Analyst***. Appointments may be requested by the student or recommended by staff to support personal and professional goals.

Graduation Requirements

Course Requirements:
- Completion of 3 trimesters (1 year) of Vocational, Craft, and Internship/Project based coursework
- More than 50% of assignments successfully completed
- More than 50% of progress reports have a designation of at least "Developing" by the mid-term spring trimester

Students looking to enter the 3-year full time-program are given an evaluation in the spring to see if they qualify for entry based on instructor recommendation.

Vocational Competency:
- 1 interview
- 1 writing sample
- 1 public speaking presentation

Volunteer Hours:
- 10 hours

Minimum Attendance:
- Must be present in classes 80% or more of the time. Attendance is recorded daily.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

By the end of this program, you will be able to:

1. **Understand core concepts in media arts** – Explain certain key ideas, terms, and current trends in design, storytelling, animation, 3D, and digital post-production.

2. **Adapt and solve problems** – Try out new tools and workflows, respond to feedback, and find solutions to creative and technical challenges — and know when to seek more learning or outside expertise.

3. **Manage your personal and professional growth** – Balance school, creative work, and personal life by staying organized, looking after your well-being, and setting realistic career and personal goals.

4. **Apply core media arts skills** – Use your skills across design, storytelling, animation, 3D, and digital post-production to create projects with the right tools and techniques.

5. **Prepare for employment or further study** – Build a professional portfolio and resume, and develop networking, interviewing, and job-search strategies to help you move into work or advanced training.

6. **Work professionally in creative environments** – Communicate clearly, collaborate with others, adapt to different roles, meet deadlines, and present your work to classmates, instructors, and industry professionals.

7. **Demonstrate professional conduct** – Be reliable, respectful, and accountable, take ownership of your work, and meet high creative and technical standards.

8. **Develop essential social skills** – Develop strategies for understanding and responding to others, listening actively, recognizing personal needs and boundaries, and handling conflicts respectfully.

Course Sequence Overview

Level/ Year	Course Group	Fall	Winter	Spring
Year 1	**Vocational**	MAF 101– Work-Life Skills 1	MAF 201 – Work-Life Skills 2	MAF 301 – Work-Life Skills 3
	Craft & Technical	MAF 102 – Storytelling with Words and Pictures	MAF 203 – Digital Tools 2: Motion Graphics	MAF 304 – Digital Tools 4: Intermediate 3D
		MAF 103 – Design & Digital Tools I	MAF 204 – Digital Tools 3: Intro to 3D	MAF 305 - AI and Visual Effects
		MAF 104 – Drawing + Animation		
	Internship /Project		MAF 202 – Media Communication and Writing (Professional Skills)	MAF - 302 Work-Integrated Learning or MAF 303 – Portfolio Project/Mentorship

Course Descriptions and Course Objectives

Trimester 1:

MAF 101 Work-Life Skills 1
Beginning with essential life and adulting skills, this course delves into the challenges and skills required for students' transitioning into independent living and studying in a post-secondary setting. Course work weaves into the technical courses and aims to improve the students' executive function, social and emotional well being with a curriculum that finds a meaningful balance between professional expectations, personal experience, and abilities.

Course Objectives

- Identify and implement strategies for improving executive functioning, including organization, task management, and planning.
- Apply social etiquette and communication skills in school, work, and social environments.
- Recognize and manage stress, anxiety, and emotional responses in professional and academic settings.
- Develop a personal finance plan that includes budgeting for living expenses, education, and professional development.
- Make informed dietary choices that support mental health and focus.
- Learn the basics of how to apply for jobs, write resumes, and prepare for interviews.
- Develop strategies for maintaining a work-life balance, integrating career goals with social and personal well-being.

MAF 102 – Storytelling with Words and Pictures
The best way to understand a story is to understand and tell your own. Part screenwriting, video editing and part media studies, this writing, creating, and reading course asks students to consider the dramatic structure of not only the shows they watch, the games they play but also the lives they lead and the activities of others. Students will use Adobe Premiere pro editing software.

Course Objectives

- Expand writing skills using film language as a basis for storytelling development.
- Utilize the three-act structure through research and implementation in own material.
- Discover different ways to edit footage, pictures, and sound together to deliver information or a story.
- Compare and contrast different games, movies, and televisions shows for understanding of how stories are interpreted in different ways .
- Understand and distinguish between different aspect ratios and formats in post production.
- Demonstrate foundational editing skills in Adobe Premiere.

MAF 103 – Design & Digital Tools 1
An introduction to design, color, and digital platform fundamentals, students in this course create digital content with the Adobe Creative suite and other relevant software and technologies. In addition to learning the techniques of digital tools, this project based class will explore the latest in image making technologies used by the entertainment and media industries.

Course Objectives

- Build clean composites with layers, control stacking order, opacity, blending modes; transform/alignment.
- Implement, correct, and style color & tone.
- Apply the Elements & Principles of Design, establish focal point and hierarchy.
- Design with typography for clarity choosing fonts with readable size and contrast.
- Create simple vector-based graphics.
- Prepare assets for print and screen, verify dimensions when required for export.

MAF 104 – Drawing + Animation
Put charcoal and pencil to paper and start drawing! And then animate! A course that bobs and weaves between the digital world of Adobe Animate animation software and the fundamentals of drawing, this course provides a solid start to creating 2D animations.

This introductory course uses the 12 Principles of Animation and cinematic techniques for visual storytelling to develop students' artistic and storytelling skills. Work will also focus on the development of positive professional habits including note-taking, organization, and presenting work, as well as performing various aspects of the animation production process and pipeline. (The drawing component hones students' and observational skills and helps build aesthetic sensibilities, concentration and portfolios.)

Course Objectives

- Create original drawings using basic shapes, proportions, and design principles.
- Demonstrate simple animation techniques (flipbooks, bouncing ball, walk cycle).
- Apply storytelling skills in short projects combining drawing and animation.
- Share work in progress and provide feedback in class critiques.

Trimester 2

MAF 201 – Work-Life Skills 2
A continuation of Work-life Skills 1, this is a course designed to reach beyond topics of work and academic success explored in the first semester. Students explore meditation, yoga, exercise, nutrition, and other mindful and health forward pursuits. Its unique structure is weaved into the weekly schedule so that the student's salutary activities become routine.

Course Objectives

- Initiate, maintain, and appropriately exit workplace-relevant professional conversations in one-on-one and small-group settings.
- Apply professional communication norms across modalities, including in-person, virtual, email, and text-based communication.
- Demonstrate conversational reciprocity through trading information, topic maintenance, and appropriate follow-up questions to sustain professional interactions across workplace contexts.
- Identify and apply strategies for entering group conversations and sustaining professional rapport in meetings, studios, and collaborative settings.
- Demonstrate awareness of tone, timing, and context in professional communication, including appropriate use of informal language, across workplace and networking environments.

MAF 202 – Media Business Communication and Writing (Professional Skills)
Interview skills, networking, resume writing, and email communication are just a few of the competences needed to transition into the working world. In this course, students practice and deliver the fundamentals of workforce transition activities.

Course Objectives

- Identify and evaluate job and internship opportunities that align with their skills, interests, and career goals.
- Create tailored professional materials, including resumes, cover letters and, time permitting, artist statements and portfolio content.
- Demonstrate effective interview and networking strategies, including preparing responses and follow-up communications.
- Apply clear, respectful workplace communication practices and problem-solving strategies across common professional scenarios.
- Apply feedback on materials including but not limited to resumes, cover letters, and portfolio pieces with the goal of applying to multiple workplace opportunities

MAF 203 – Digital Tools 2: Motion Graphics
Students will use After Effects to combine their knowledge of Graphic Design with the 12 Principles of Animation to create engaging animations.

Course Objectives

- Understand and apply 12 Principles of Animation to Motion Graphics.
- Understand and apply 6 Elements of Design to Motion Graphics.
- Understand and apply 6 Principles of Design to Motion Graphics.
- Adapt to After Effects workflow.
- Create dynamic and complex imagery employing moving material.

MAF 204 – Digital Tools 3: Intro to 3D

Paperman, Into the Spiderverse, and The Wild Robot all push the medium of 3D Animation and blend visual aesthetics associated with hand drawn animation. This course demystifies the discipline of 3D art and animation by providing an engaging tour of Blender. Students unfamiliar with 3D will discover the joy of this tool. Blender has been used in the industry by Sony for VFX, CD Projekt Red for modeling, and created the Oscar award winning *Flow* (2024).

Course Objectives

- Show an understanding of 3D software and interface.
- Show an engaged curiosity of the 3D discipline.
- Express an understanding of navigation in a 3D environment.
- Utilize controls of keyframe animation of 3D transforms.

Trimester 3

MAF 301 – Work-Life Skills 3
A continuation of Work-life Skills 1 and 2, this is a course designed to teach students about the different situations and responsibilities they may encounter in the workplace and related functions. The course also introduces basic spreadsheet and presentation creation tasks so students are equipped with the skills to succeed in different dynamic environments.

Course Objectives

- Initiate, maintain, and appropriately exit workplace-relevant professional conversations in one-on-one and small-group settings.
- Understand disagreements that may happen in a workplace setting and how to resolve through conflict resolution
- Identify and apply strategies for entering group conversations and sustaining professional rapport in meetings, studios, and collaborative settings.
- Demonstrate awareness of tone, timing, and context in professional communication, including appropriate use of informal language, across workplace and networking environments.
- Understand how to interact with co-workers during parties and events even when you don't normally engage with them
- Demonstrate the creation of basic formulas using spreadsheet software such as Google Sheets.
- Demonstrate the creation of basic presentation decks using software such as Google Slides.

MAF - 302 Work-Integrated Learning _or_ MAF 303 – Portfolio Project/Mentorship
Students complete a work placement– paid or unpaid– of at least 80 hours. Comprising up to two days per week of entry level work in a creative industry based organization, the placement runs in parallel with the Professional Practice course giving students and their employers persistent support in their pursuit. Weekly reflection and assessment prepares the students for further workforce transition or study.

Students may elect to develop a project for their portfolio in lieu of a work placement with a mentor. In this self-directed creative project, students build a portfolio piece on a platform of their choice in animation, motion graphics, editing, VFX, or writing.

Course Objectives - MAF 302

- Demonstrate professional etiquette in a work environment.
- Execute designated tasks by site supervisor as assigned.
- Demonstrate proficiency in computer graphic software as needed.
- Utilize office applications for communication and presentations.
- Implement media arts skills into professional projects.
- Generalize digital arts skills to different areas of the workforce including but not limited to social media, digital conversion, and video editing.
- Demonstrate time management, organization, teamwork, and responsiveness to feedback.

Course Objectives - MAF 303

- Execute the development of pre-production materials for project creation.
- Propose an idea that utilizes various digital arts skills obtained throughout the Media Arts Foundation Program.
- Organizes materials for development of a creative project.
- Combine material into a new original output of creative expression.
- Utilize various resources in order to enhance the detailed output of major work creation.
- Create an updated portfolio, website, or demo reel showing skill set.

MAF 304 – Digital Tools 4: Intermediate 3D

Students continue their exploration of 3D software to create work of greater complexity and completion. Beyond the basics, students will learn how to apply the concepts taught in previous classes. This course will also provide an introduction to game engine software, leading students to understand how 3D is applied in various ways to different areas of the digital arts.

Course Objectives

- Show an understanding of 3D software and interface.
- Utilize controls of keyframe animation and 3D transforms.
- Apply previously learned concepts to greater project creation output.
- Learn how to apply 3D materials to game engine software, broadening generalization skills in digital art implementation.

MAF 305 - VFX and New Tools

This course is an exploration into emerging tools and technologies in our modern media arts environment. Students utilize GenerativeAI tools such as Runway ML to create and manipulate video. In their journey they will also learn about the basics of visual effects such as tracking and rotoscoping, applying AI to existing frameworks for new creative expression.

Course Objectives

- Utilize GenerativeAI for the creation of video assets.
- Understand the limits and possibilities of utilizing AI in a professional pipeline.
- Utilize tools that help and support the application of visual effects processes.
- Learn the basics of visual effects methodologies including tracking and rotoscoping.